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You’ve helped transform the treatment of melanoma and renal cell carcinoma over the last decade with the introduction of immunotherapy treatment. How has the tremendous growth in treatment options and success impacted your patients’ options?

It has been an absolute privilege to be a part of the current revolution in cancer care. Together, our scientists and physicians have all played a pivotal role in taking cancer care a huge step forward. But, we’re not done—until we can cure 100% of our patients with little to no toxicities, there is still work to do. Despite the significant progress in FDA-approved treatments, patients should be considered for trials and physicians should be very motivated to offer our patients innovative therapies. While survival has increased dramatically, I am determined to see further progress in the next decade.

What areas are the Yale SPORE in Skin Cancer focused on?

Our SPORE (Specialized Programs of Research Excellence) grant is in its 13th year of funding from the National Cancer Institute and currently has four primary areas of research. The first, led by Michael Girardi, MD, W. Mark Saltzman, PhD, and

Douglas Brash, PhD, is focused on the creation of a morning-after sunscreen to help reverse the intracellular processes that continue to cause sun damage after exposure. Dr. David Hafler’s lab is working with my research team on developing blood tests to measure activity of the immune cells that come from a tumor to predict response to immunotherapy. Qin Yan, PhD, Marcus Bosenberg, MD, PhD, and Mario Sznol, MD, are working together to study KDM5 enzymes and their link to immunotherapy resistance in melanoma. And lastly, I am working with Dr. Bosenberg and Susan Kaech, PhD, to study co-activation of the innate and adaptive immune systems using novel drugs that affect both of these arms of the immune system.

In your role as Associate Cancer Center Director for Education, Training, and Faculty Development, what are some of the priorities in mentorship and training at Yale Cancer Center?

The past five years have seen a striking increase in training program opportunities at Yale Cancer Center. We have worked diligently to build programs across the spectrum, from high school students to junior faculty, and across disciplines, including basic, translational, clinical, and outcomes research. We are fortunate to have received training grants to allow our trainees to have protected research time and the capacity to participate in workshops and new courses. These new programs have increased our ability to attract stellar scholars, and the additional generous support of Yale Cancer Center has enabled us to recruit diverse trainees.